

Nominative CSMs conference

NCO leadership discusses challenges facing Corps, makes recommendations for program refinements

By Sgt. 1st Class (Ret.) Phil Tegtmeier

More than 250 sergeants major gathered in January at Fort Bliss, Texas, taking part in the third annual Sergeant Major of the Army's Nominative Command Sergeants Major Conference.

The forum, hosted by Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley, brings the Army's most influential noncommissioned officers together to meet with members of the Army staff and to develop solutions to challenges facing the NCO Corps. The U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command supported the event. The attendees all serve in leadership positions in commands led by general officers.

"This conference continues to provide our [NCO] Corps with a dynamic forum to discuss and design initiatives to enhance our craft," Tilley said. He singled out areas for the group to address during the conference, including a new skills development test, E-5 drill sergeants, developmental counseling and other personnel issues. "It is my vision that these areas will enhance the awareness, capabilities and opportunities for our soldiers and the Army," Tilley said.

The keynote speaker, Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White, challenged the attendees to focus on four areas to ensure the Army's continuing success.

The four areas — mental and physical toughness, marksmanship, combat lifesaver skills and small-unit drills — will provide soldiers the fundamentals they need.

"NCOs must know the standards their soldiers must train to, they must be able to perform...to those standards and they need to train their soldiers to those standards," White said. He said that by focusing on the four areas, and maintaining their units to the standards those areas require, the NCO Corps will have done its job.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki also addressed the conference attendees during the opening session. He spoke of the transformation the Army is undergoing and charged the attendees with taking care of the NCOs' main job of preparing the Army's future leaders.

"The Sergeant Major of the Army of the year 2025 is in the Army today," Shinseki said. "People are everything, and it doesn't matter how we're equipped

or manned in the future. We have to remember our NCO Corps needs to focus on developing tomorrow's leaders. Our job is to grow the SMA of 2025 today."

After the opening session, other senior Army officials briefed the attendees. During the week, they applied their experience and knowledge to a variety of issues facing the Army today, with breakout groups of 10-20 sergeants major focusing on specific topics.

"Everything we worked on in the conference was to make the Army a better place for soldiers and make [the Army] more effective," said Command Sgt. Maj. Vincent Myers. Myers was the senior NCO in the Coalition Forces Land Component Command, Third Army, U.S. Central Command when he traveled to the conference from Kuwait.

In the breakout groups, attendees prepared concrete recommendations to give to the Army's senior leadership. The issues came from the Army Training and Leader Development Panel's Phase II (NCO Study) report. The study, conducted last year, is the largest self-assessment study ever done by the Army. It focused on training and leader development requirements for NCOs. Subjects the attendees are forwarding recommendations



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley makes a point about Army values.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class (Ret.) Phil Tegtmeier

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The attendees gathered for a group photo in front of the Centennial Club, site of many of the conference sessions.

on include ways to ensure NCOs have clearly defined career paths and can measure their own performance toward meeting promotion and retention requirements, as well as thoughts on how to improve the NCO Education System (NCOES).

Myers said his group, for example, tackled a congressionally mandated re-schooling for soldiers who have newly acquired military occupational specialties (MOS). The program would affect mostly reserve component soldiers.

When units are mobilized and soldiers are re-assigned to new sections, some soldiers may not be specialty-qualified in the new MOS. However, those soldiers may also be on the brink of a mission, Myers said. The transition can result in lost training time for soldiers.

"You never get time back," Myers said. "You never want to say you wish you had three more days."

Topics covered included:

- E-5 Drill Sergeants – The Army will launch a pilot program to determine if sergeants should be assigned as drill sergeants in basic training and advanced individual training.
- Skills Development Assessment – The ATLDP (NCO Study) report indicates NCOs in the field want a test that would measure

their competencies and provide them with a clear view of their chances for promotion. The Army is studying how to introduce a test to the field while avoiding some of the pitfalls that have harmed acceptance of past military occupational specialty tests and skills qualification tests. Those pitfalls included making study time available to those taking the tests, inconsistency in how NCOs used the scores to identify soldiers with promotion potential and high administrative costs.

- NCOES – The Army leadership is studying ways to consolidate and further improve the network of NCO academies around the United States and overseas. The attendees also focused on expanding the use of distance-learning methods.
- Developmental Counseling – NCOs in the field indicated in the ATDLDP (NCO Study) that they were concerned NCOs did not receive developmental counseling training that resulted in measurable performance ratings on the NCO Evaluation Report. The attendees looked at providing the training to NCOs as well as civilian and officer supervisors who may be less familiar with the NCOER process. (See related article on page 19.)

In all, the attendees covered nearly 20 topics. At press time, the Sergeant Major of the Army's office was finalizing recommendations to send forward to the Chief of Staff of the Army.

The attendees also tapped into the experience of six former Sergeants Major of the Army. They held a panel, answering questions from the attendees, and met one-on-one with participants throughout the week.

"This conference truly leverages the experience of our NCO Corps," Tilley said. "We're using that experience to tackle complex issues and work them for the Chief of Staff. These are issues that will not only make our Army stronger, but will help ensure our soldiers remain the best trained, best equipped and best led in the world." (Editor's note: Sgt. Erika Gladhill, CFLCC Public Affairs, contributed to this article.)

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley presents a copy of FM 7-22.7, The NCO Guide, to Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki.

Photo by Master Sgt. Richard Puckett

